

STATE OF MONTANA
SENATE NO. 13
DATE 2-19-07
BY SB 452

February 19, 2007

Please accept the following comments in support of Senate Bill 452.

The Yaak Valley Forest Council is a conservation and community service organization in Lincoln County, Montana, where for the last ten years we have been advocating for protection of the Yaak Valley's wild and special places, while at the same time advocating for the preservation of our rural heritage. Our mission statement includes the charge to help develop and promote a local sustainable economy that continues to be based upon the natural resources of this most northwestern corner of the state. Our supporters include hunting and fishing guides, loggers, millworkers, millowners, educators, snowmobilers, ATV club members, and local businesspeople.

We support Senate Bill 452 because it is integral to a piece of important community development work in which a coalition of the above interests has been involved for several years. Our group has crafted a place-based local proposal that will revitalize the ailing timber industry in Lincoln County, where unemployment has hovered around 14% for the last many years. The acquisition and local co-management of a Community or "Restoration" Forest is a key part of the economic and community development our group has been seeking for years.

Securing key industrial timberlands in the Yaak, and in Lincoln County, will also protect the traditional access of hunters, hikers, anglers, snowmobilers, and ATV and wilderness enthusiasts of our coalition.

Producing wood from these lands—whether biomass for our local school, or small-diameter specialty wood for another of our partners, Chapel Cedar Mill of Troy—the last independent sawmill in Lincoln County—will help revitalize our local economy and will help retain a proud and independent rural culture, while also aiding in preserving a critical infrastructure—forest management—that is vital to providing necessary skilled personnel involved in the management of area public lands—another investment and resource that would therefore benefit from Senate Bill 452.

The foresight of securing the most special and productive lands will only increase both the long-term economic development of the region as well as preserving this unique culture of Lincoln County and the Yaak: the wettest, lowest-elevation, and most timber-dependent region in the state of Montana. Senate Bill 452, though it speaks to the needs of all Montanans, seems tailor-made for Lincoln County. It offers us a chance to retain some independence and gives us the tools for stewardship and sustainability. Thank you for your foresight and support of this wise and historic legislation.

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